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## IN BRIEF

### THE NEST AND EGGS OF *ESTRILDA CAERULESCENS*

According to Serle & Morel (1977), the nest and eggs of free-living Lavender Firefinch *Estrilda caerulescens* are undescribed; they have, however, been bred in captivity (Goodwin 1982). In the course of regular ornithological field work at the ORSTOM Station site at M'Bour, Sénégal (14°23' N, 16°57' W), this species, which is very common, was found breeding at the end of August, in the middle of the rainy season. A nest with fresh eggs was found on 10 August 1986.

The nest was in an area of small clearings in which herbaceous vegetation predominated, edged with native shrubs (Mimoseae, Capparidaceae). The woody vegetation, which had been seriously affected by the droughts of 1972–73, included numerous dead and fallen trees, favouring the growth of lianas (*Antigonum leptopus*, *Momordica balsamina*, *Ipomaea* sp.). The site was also crossed by narrow tracks, favourable to the development of tall bordering weeds on whose seeds the Lavender Firefinch feeds.

The nest, 3 m above ground on a partially dead tree (*Cassia siamea*), was placed between three forked twigs of a terminal whorl. It was abundantly covered with, and well hidden by, the liana *Momordica balsamina*. The nest was domed and had at the top a very long (15 cm) and narrow (1.5 cm diameter) entrance tunnel. The nest chamber was some 12 cm deep and 8 cm wide. The total volume of the nest was estimated at 3 dm<sup>3</sup>, which is astonishing for the size of the bird (wing-length 52 mm, weight 8 g). The outer part of the nest was rather roughly made, but the interior was well padded. It was mainly composed of a graminaceous plant (*Bracharia distichophylla*), and still green at the time of its discovery, with some *Momordica* leaves around the nest chamber. No feathers or any other material was found inside the nest.

The eggs, 3 in number, were ovoid, uniformly cream-coloured with a slight pink tinge. When found they were translucent, indicating that they were newly laid. They measured 14.7 × 10.9, 15.0 × 10.1 and 15.9 × 11.4 mm and each weighed c. 0.9 g. If the clutch was complete, it was similar to that of related species in Africa, but on the low side for a savanna species (*Lagonosticta senegalensis* average 3.5; most savanna estrildines average 4.3, forest estrildines 3.7; Morel 1969).

In this relatively open environment, conditions seem ideal for this savanna species, as food resources, both seeds and insects, are abundant during the rainy season. Lavender Firefinches can often be seen foraging with other estrildines (*L. senegala*, *Estrilda bengala*). We can regard these species as forming a guild, in Blondel's sense of "un groupe d'espèces affines qui fréquentent et se partagent, selon des modalités parfois très subtiles, un type de ressources du milieu".

We should stress that we found nesting Lavender Firefinches extremely shy and secretive, which probably accounts for the fact that their nest has hitherto remained unknown.

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#### ON THE NAME "FRIENDLY GROUND-DOVE"

The common name of *Gallicolumba stairi* has long been "Friendly Ground-Dove" (most recently Watling 1982, *Birds of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa*; Sibley & Monroe 1990, *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World*; Clements 1991, *Birds of the World: A Check List*) or its variant "Friendly Quail Dove" (Howard & Moore 1991, *A Complete Checklist of the Birds of the World*). However, some authors have objected to applying the term "Friendly" to this very shy species. Watling (*loc. cit.*) wrote "The Friendly Ground-Dove has a most inappropriate common name, since far from being friendly it is a timid, wary bird, the usual sighting being a brief glimpse of a brown bird flying swiftly away". Clunie (1984, *Birds of the Fiji Bush*) instead used "West Polynesian Ground-Dove". Pratt *et al.* (1987, *A Field Guide to the Birds of Hawaii and the Tropical Pacific*) coined "Shy Ground-Dove", and commented: "Other name: Friendly Ground-Dove. This ridiculous and misleading name is well entrenched in the literature, but virtually every author has felt the need to remark about its inappropriateness. Perhaps the name originated as a bad joke. We suggest the above alternative [Shy Ground-Dove] so that future authors will not have to explain that the name is a lie."

The name "Friendly Ground-Dove" was neither a bad joke nor a lie. When it was coined, it was a simple and honest choice. Many birds of the Pacific islands are named after the archipelagoes they inhabit, especially if